

WHS Project: The Pieces of the Puzzle

Defining the “Architectural Education Program”

While our increasing enrollment may have been the initial major catalyst for the High School project, it is now but only one of the drivers. Initial proposals focused on adding classrooms with minor structural repairs. This proposal was to cost an estimated \$16 million and sustain the building for 10 years. However, as the building was more closely examined, the true conditions came to light: major structural systems are approaching the end of their respective lifespans; the building design impedes the ability to deliver the educational program, as it has evolved; and the design severely restricts student flow. Renovating the entire building has become as critical as meeting enrollment needs. With that in mind, the town embarked on the project now underway.

Last week, I described the evolution of the **WHS Educational Program** over the last few decades. The Educational Program, including the Extracurricular Programs, provides the basis for the delivery of education at the high school and determines the answer to the question, “*What will the building be used for?*” The question that follows is, “*To enable the program, what needs to be included in the building?*” Specifically, the number and type of spaces that would enable the delivery of the Educational Program of today and spaces to accommodate future educational programs in a building to last 50 years need to be identified. The list of spaces needed is called the **Architectural Education Program**.

Developing the Architectural Education Program

To develop the *Architectural Education Program*, the School Committee engaged an educational consultant and 35 community members (including high school students, parents, teachers and administrators) to tackle this challenge in a “*visioning process*.”

The *Visioning Committee* considered how the Educational Program would be delivered in light of how instructional practice has evolved over time and might continue to evolve. The committee toured new and recently renovated local high schools and reviewed alternate space designs employed across the country. Several public forums were held over a period of months.

The consultant assimilated the information and prepared a comprehensive review of the spaces required to deliver the Educational Program today and into the future. This comprehensive review details the **Architectural Education Program**. The full report can be found at the Wellesley Public Library and on the town website at www.wellesley.ma.gov under School Building Committee, *DeJong Report*.

The Pieces of the Puzzle

A brief summary of the program components is in the inset box. Some of the more critical determinations are:

Standard Classrooms: Specified for maximum flexibility and to support multiple instructional practices.

Flex Classrooms: Specified for community or classroom use to maximize utilization of the building during lower enrollment periods.

Professional spaces: Specified to encourage collaboration among and between departments. Adjacencies were recommended to promote efficiency and sharing of space, collaboration and coherence of programs.

Special education spaces: Specified to enable the delivery of a successful, cost-effective Special Education program.

Performing Arts and Music: Choral, band/orchestra, drama and dance classrooms specified to accommodate the high participation rates of Wellesley students and the breadth and depth of the music programs.

Auditorium and associated spaces: The auditorium is specified to seat 750; auxiliary spaces such as the control booth and storage are also detailed.

Gymnasium: The gymnasium is specified to accommodate the high participation rates of Wellesley students and the inclusion of an indoor elevated track.

The ***Architectural Education Program*** provides the pieces of the puzzle, but not necessarily how they fit together. There are many factors that must be considered in determining a solution including: enabling the Educational Program, cost to the town, and impact on current students and neighbors. Of major consideration is the eligibility for state reimbursement of construction costs.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) guidelines quantify specifically the size and type of spaces that are eligible for reimbursement. The *Visioning Committee* worked with the architects and consultant to create an Architectural Education Program that adheres to MSBA guidelines as much as possible. The final Architectural Education Program differs from the MSBA guidelines in areas where the guidelines would not support the Educational Program as envisioned for future enrollment.

The next step for the School Building Committee is to fit the puzzle pieces together in a cohesive design while weighing the multiple factors. With the approval of Town Meeting this past spring, the School Building Committee engaged an architect to provide preliminary “fit tests” which explore how the pieces of the puzzle might fit together. Together, the SBC and architects will assess an array of possible solutions including renovation/addition and new construction. This review process is designed to engage the community at large to prompt questions, creativity and consensus toward an optimal solution that will meet the needs of our present and future Wellesley students, while being responsive and mindful of town interests at large.

WHS

Architectural Education Program

The major components of the program as approved by the School Committee in summary are:

- ♦ 46 classrooms
- ♦ 12 science classroom/laboratories
- ♦ 7 flex classrooms
- ♦ specialized spaces (applied learning and creative arts)
- ♦ administrative spaces
- ♦ special education spaces
- ♦ one library/media center
- ♦ one large gymnasium which can be divided into 3 spaces with an elevated practice running track
- ♦ one auditorium, seats 750, has appropriate supporting spaces (practice rooms, instrument storage)
- ♦ one cafeteria with capacity to serve 1/3 of students at one time (500 students)
- ♦ 313,693 total square feet